

# Representative Don Carlson

49th District

## 1997 Session Review



Dear Neighbors,

This year's legislative session was very historic and full of accomplishments. First of all, the Legislature completed the 105-day session on schedule. This is the first year since 1957 that lawmakers have finished a budget-writing session within its allotted time.

By the time lawmakers completed their work on April 27, we had resolved many important issues. First, we passed a two-year operating budget that increases funding for K-12 and higher education while limiting state spending to its smallest increase in growth since 1971. We reduced taxes by more than \$400 million, putting more money into the pockets of hard-working families. We also approved monumental legislation to reform the state's welfare and juvenile justice systems. Finally, we OK'd several bills designed to improve K-12 and higher education.

Highlights of these and other issues are featured in this newsletter. Please take a few minutes to read it. If you have questions or comments about bills listed in this report, or other measures, please contact my home or my Olympia office. I appreciate hearing your views.

Sincerely,

### 1997-99 operating budget approved

After a compromise was reached with Gov. Locke in the last weekend of the session, the Legislature approved a two-year \$19.073 billion operating budget, \$112 million below the limit set by Initiative 601. This budget represents a 7.7 percent increase over the previous biennium, which is the smallest biennial increase since 1971. The two-year spending plan leaves the state with a responsible reserve fund of \$366 million. Several important areas are funded by the budget. Here is a summary of how the budget will be spent:

**K-12 education:** The budget provides \$8.9 billion for our public schools — a 7.1 percent spending increase over the previous budget. This includes a 3 percent salary increase for teachers and other education employees; \$20 million for instruction materials, including books, classroom supplies and software (\$458 per average-sized classroom); \$275,000 for expansion of student teacher centers;

plus funding for vocational education and Readiness to Learn programs.

**Higher education:** About \$2.2 billion is earmarked for our state's colleges and universities. This is an 11.54 percent increase over the previous biennium. This funding does not include money in the 1997-99 capital budget for construction and repair projects on our higher education campuses. The goal of greater access was addressed, as the budget provides an additional 6,390 enrollment slots, including 4,200 slots for our community and technical college system. There also is nearly \$34 million provided for financial aid programs, including the State Need Grant, State Work Study and Educational Opportunity Grant programs. College faculty and staff will receive a 3 percent raise, and there is \$4 million in funding for the faculty retention pool, which will allow higher education institutions to keep their all-star faculty.

**Basic Health Plan:** The budget provides an additional 8,000 openings for the BHP, which provides subsidized health care for low-income families.

## Tax reductions achieved

I was pleased that the Legislature this year approved \$414 million in tax cuts — with relief aimed at property taxpayers, senior citizens and small businesses.

The Legislature and Gov. Locke approved a one-year extension of the 4.7 percent reduction in the state property tax levy that was enacted in 1995. However, when lawmakers tried to pass a comprehensive and long-term property tax relief and reform package, the governor chose to veto our proposal. As a result, the Legislature sent our package to the ballot as a referendum, allowing Washington voters to have the final say in November. Under this comprehensive package, the owner of a \$110,000 home would save about \$50 next year, as much as \$540 over the next five years, and up to \$23,000 over the life of a 30-year mortgage.

The Legislature voted overwhelmingly to complete the repeal of the business and occupation tax increase imposed in 1993. That tax hike targeted selected businesses, with increases of up to 66 percent placing a huge burden on many small employers. After the governor vetoed our first bill that would have begun the repeal this year, he agreed to sign a similar measure that will begin implementation of the repeal in 1998.

Late in the session, lawmakers passed a bill to bar property taxes on business intangibles. SB 5286 later was signed into law. The exemptions include such things as trademarks, trade names, brand names, patents, copyrights, franchise agreements, trade secrets, noncompete agreements, customer lists and patient lists.

## Historic welfare reform measure signed into law

The Legislature passed a landmark bill that will reform the state's 60-year-old welfare system. This measure will emphasize personal responsibility and reward work. The jointly sponsored proposal, House-Senate Bill 3901, was signed into law by Gov. Locke after lengthy negotiations between his office and legislative leaders. The bill includes the following components:

**Time limits:** Welfare recipients will receive benefits up to 60 months in a lifetime. Extensions will apply for the disabled, extreme hardship cases or victims of domestic violence.

**Required work activities:** From the time they enter the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, all adult welfare recipients will be required to take part in the Washington Work First Program. They will first be required to search for a job. If they cannot find one, they will have to participate in subsidized or unsubsidized

work, on-the-job training, vocational education or community service.

**Child care:** TANF recipients and low-income wage earners will be able to receive child-care assistance. A \$10 co-pay will be required for most recipients.



Rep. Carlson enjoys a light moment while listening to testimony during a House Higher Education Committee meeting.

## Juvenile justice system to be revamped

On the last weekend of session, House and Senate lawmakers unanimously passed a measure that will reform the state's outdated and flawed juvenile justice system formed in 1977.

House-Senate Bill 3900 will ensure that older juvenile offenders would face some type of punishment for their crime, starting with the first offense.

Under the bill, 16- and 17-year-olds automatically will go to the adult court system if they are accused of drive-by shootings, first-degree robbery, first-degree child rape, first-degree burglary with a previous conviction, and any crime in which the offender was armed with a firearm. Currently, offenders ages 16 and 17 who commit murder and rape, or who are chronic and violent offenders, automatically are sent to the adult court system.

## Seahawks stadium issue sent to state voters

After balking at other proposals to fund a new stadium for the Seattle Seahawks, the Legislature approved HB 2192, which would pay for most of the stadium through a state tax on hotel rooms in King County that won't be collected until 2016. The 2 percent room tax currently is paying off

the debt on the Kingdome. State voters will be able to decide in June whether they support this proposal. I voted against the bill for several reasons: First, I don't believe the Kingdome should be demolished. It still is a good, useful facility. Second, I don't believe state funds should be used to pay for a sports stadium that will benefit one person. Third, I feel that stadium supporters used deception in manipulating citizens to back the proposal.

**Here is a list of important bills, divided by issue, that were addressed by lawmakers. All of these measures passed the Legislature and were sent to the governor.**

## K-12 education

**HB 1303** - Would allow school boards to grant waivers from state laws and rules to schools which have collaboratively developed a proposal to improve student learning or better meet the needs of students in their individual school. This flexibility would challenge the one-size-fits-all mentality and free schools to find a better way to improve student achievement in their school.

**HB 1581** - Would improve safety for students and teachers by making it easier to keep violent, disruptive students, gang members, and juvenile sex offenders out of schools.

**HB 2042** - Under this reading measure, school districts will be required to choose a reading-skill evaluation test from a list provided by the superintendent of public instruction and to administer it to all second graders by the 1998-99 school year. Students not reading at grade level will be given extra help. It will also establish a grant program to provide teachers professional development in teaching reading and to provide effective models for use statewide. Partially vetoed by the governor.

## Higher education

**HB 1372** - Will establish a prepaid tuition payment program to help make higher education affordable and accessible to all Washingtonians. This program will allow family members to buy tuition units for their children or other relatives at today's prices. These units could be purchased in small quantities over the years before a youngster is ready for college. I prime-sponsored this bill, which was signed into law.

**SB 5927** - Would provide state colleges and universities with more tuition flexibility. Tuition would increase 4 percent per year during the 1997-99 biennium. The only exception would be at the University of Washington, where tuition each year would increase 8.3 percent for nonresident undergraduate students, 7.3 percent for resident law school students, and 6.7 percent for nonresident law school students.

**HB 1047** - Signed into law, it will allow public four-year universities and community colleges to waive all or a portion of tuition and fees for members of the Washington National Guard and certain state employees on a space-available basis. Eligible state employees are faculty, librarians, counselors and exempt professional and administrative employees who work halftime or more at public colleges and universities. I prime-sponsored this proposal.

**SB 5464** - Gains in gender equity made by female intercollegiate athletes will continue under this bill that was signed into law. It allows higher education institutions to retain a waiver of up to 1 percent of their estimated tuition and fee revenue to achieve or maintain gender equity in intercollegiate athletic programs. I introduced a very similar measure (HB 1437) this year.

## Health care

**HB 1850** - Would help create a high-quality long-term care system that provides greater consumer protections and certain facility standards.

**SB 5127** - Would allow money to be raised for hospitals to provide trauma care. Under the measure, a \$5 surcharge on all moving violations and a \$6.50 fee on car sales would be imposed to raise \$11.5 million a year for the statewide trauma-care fund. The money would be used to reimburse hospitals, doctors and ambulance companies that provide emergency surgery and other medical treatment to uninsured and underinsured patients with life-threatening injuries.

## Environment

**HB 2096** - Would consolidate all oil spill prevention, planning and response activities of the Office of Marine Safety and Department of Ecology into one division within DOE. It contains strong intent language that restates the commitment to prevention and response.

**SB 7900** - Would make important changes to the Model Toxic Control Act to accomplish better, faster and cheaper cleanups. The emphasis on increased technical assistance would assure more effective site cleanups. The bill also would further the goals of redeveloping previously contaminated industrial and commercial sites.

## Housing

**HB 1928** - Will allow the Housing Finance Commission to impose covenants on housing or other facilities that are financed by the commission or programs administered by it. Recording the covenants would protect future investors in these housing developments. Signed into law.

**HB 2189** - Would create a task force to study alternative financing techniques for the development and renovation of low-income senior housing development.

## Reforming state regulations

**HB 1032** - This regulatory reform measure focuses on the problems of rules which already are in existence. It also would reinstate some of the provisions of last year's regulatory reform bill that were vetoed by then-Gov. Lowry. HB 1032 would require state agencies to review all existing state rules and regulations and tighten the process for adopting new rules. All existing rules and regulations would have to be reviewed in the next seven years, and

those that are duplicative, unnecessary or outdated would be eliminated.

## Growth management

**SB 6094** - This measure, requested by Gov. Locke, would change provisions of the Growth Management Act (GMA). It reflects recommendations made by the Land Use Study Commission on growth management. The bill addresses several issues, including rural issues, open space corridors, and agricultural zoning. It would require six Western Washington counties (including Clark County) to establish a monitoring and evaluation program to determine whether the countywide planning policies are meeting planned residential densities and uses. The evaluation must be conducted every five years.



Rep. Carlson addresses citizens during 49<sup>th</sup> District Day in Olympia.

## Call me if you need help

One of my jobs as your state representative is to help you when you have a problem with state government. If you need assistance in dealing with a state agency, feel free to contact me.

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